

## SMALL GROUP LESSON

# The Parable of the Sower 2: Seeking Godly Success

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### Lesson Aim

This lesson will teach you why it's important to understand the successful components of a 100-fold life.

### Preparation necessary

Paper, Writing instruments, Whiteboard with markers

### Scripture Text

"And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow; And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear." -Matthew 13:3-9

### Additional Scriptures

The Parable of the Sower can also be found in Mark 4:1-12 and Luke 8:4-10.

## INTRODUCTION

We're not going to talk about the three types of unsuccessful soil this week, but instead we're going to talk about the good soil because often we slide right over these verses without asking some questions. Questions like:

Have you ever wondered what the difference was between the Christians who brought forth 30 fold, 60 fold, and 100 fold?

Have you ever wondered what made some ground only bring forth 30 fold while other ground brought forth 60 fold?

Have you ever wondered if the 100-fold ground was merely a result of good fortune or was it cultivated for success?

Have you ever determined not to be just a 30-fold Christian or a 60-fold Christian, but a 100-fold Christian? (Because if you don't determine it, you'll never achieve it!)

Now to be successful in America, society will tell you it's all about money and fame. If you're not pursuing a fortune, if you're not on the cover of glossy magazines, if no gossip web site will share intimate details about your life, then you're a nobody. And being a nobody in America means you're a failure.

Except, we forget how quickly the favorite subjects of the gossip sites change, leaving the debris of human lives behind. For every famous, rich person who navigates their career successfully, there are dozens who can't, and are immediately forgotten. Plus, the successful who become beloved,

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especially athletes, often find fame is a drug they can't kick—Brett Favre couldn't stay retired for one year, Lance Armstrong insists on returning to competitive cycling after three years away, and Michael Jordan must return for two ordinary years with a losing franchise because he can't stand not being "MJ."

Scripture, of course, recommends a different path. It suggests, never demands, that the steps of Jesus are worth pursuing because even without the innumerable spiritual benefits, His lifestyle leads to peace of mind and a high quality of life.

To be a success scripturally—to attain 100-fold—means we must make several right choices throughout our lives. For a seed to grow, it must rupture to release its power. So must we. When the seed of truth settles in our heart, we get to choose exactly what type of soil it will represent, the healthy soil of the average believer, the superior soil of the achiever, or the rich, nutritious soil of true godly success.

## IDEAS

### Patient with Your Emotions

Some of the most disconcerting moments in a walk with Christ is when everything's going well and then suddenly, without warning, you can no longer feel Him. It's not a disconnect due to sin. It's not a pursuit of ungodly values. It's just living the life of faith

### Interaction

Have you ever found yourself in an emotional desert with God?

How did you react?

How long did it take before you felt at peace with Him again?

When we first come to God, we reach Him through our feelings. At some point, those feelings dissipate and we often panic, wondering where God is. Instead of seeing this as a problem, we should see this as a sign of spiritual progress, since ultimately we must relate to God through faith not feelings

Developing faith is difficult to our carnal flesh, so our emotions go into overdrive, feeling attacked and wanting to be positively reinforced. We're attacked by doubt—"Is God real?"—and fear—"What's wrong with me? Why is everyone else worshipping Him while I feel nothing?"—and maybe even anger—"Why have you left me alone God? Where are you?"

The reality is, an absence of emotion occurs in every type of human interaction, be it with friends, in marriage, and at the workplace, but our spiritual discomfort often makes us overemphasize it instead of doing what we know to do.

By maintaining our personal devotion time of prayer and scripture reading, continuing to fast and attend regular church services, and seeking Him, these habits will pull us through this emotional void stronger, wiser, and deeper in Him.

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## Teachable

He was just another farm boy, living at home with Mom and Dad. So it was just another day in his life when he hooked up the oxen and began plowing the family fields. Except this wasn't just another day. The man of God happened by, came up and plopped his mantle on the boy, and suddenly Elisha was called to be the next prophet of God. (See I Kings 19:19.)

There's every indication that, with but a few exceptions, Elisha became the great Elijah's servant in every way. Although Scripture doesn't record many conversations between them, it's obvious Elisha drained Elijah for every bit of knowledge possible because:

When Elijah indicated that he was about to leave the planet, he offered to grant a request. Elisha obviously had been hoping for just such an opportunity. He asked for a double portion (or share) of Elijah's spirit (II Kings 2:9-10). That's what he received.

His first miracle was an exact replication of Elijah's last miracle—he divided the Jordan River in half and walked across on dry ground (II Kings 2:8, 13-14). When he prayed to raise a little boy from the dead, he imitated what worked for Elijah (I Kings 17:17-23) before the Lord forced him into a deeper relationship of faith (II Kings 4:27-37).

You don't hear the description "teachable" much in America, but it's a necessity for any overcoming Christian. It worked for Elisha and it will work for us.

Maintaining a teachable spirit is similar to remaining obedient, but they're not the same. Obedience is most often a choice between "I will obey" or "I won't obey." It's often a very clear, though often difficult, choice. Developing a teachable attitude is understanding, then mastering, the subtleties of life. It's learning from the failures of others, as well as yourself. It's succeeding, but then evaluating that success to see how it might be improved. It's stoking your godly imagination for Him. It's keeping an active mind and heart alive every day.

It's interesting that this has little to do with I.Q. Often the smart and talented are too insecure to be taught or mentored because they're secretly afraid they'll be exposed as frauds. Often the great talents in sports don't win championships because they're unwilling to change their game for the good of the team. Often a great man in business will drive a company to success and then into bankruptcy because he won't change when the times change (See: Ford, Henry.) All because they aren't teachable.

## Interaction

In your mind, what are some synonyms for being "teachable"? (Think: Flexible, soft-hearted, discerning.)

What keeps you from being spiritually teachable?

What helps you to stay spiritually teachable?

It's interesting that the highest level black belts in the different martial arts are often older men and women well past their physical prime. Yet part of why they've attained their mastery is because they don't rely on raw strength, but experience, wisdom, and anticipation to win their battles.

Spiritually, we should be no different. We should be open to being used in the gifts of the Spirit? We should welcome tests of faith, for it will only prove how great our God is.

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## Abiding In Him

The cliché about engaging in a “relationship” with Jesus, as in “I have a relationship with Jesus” or “You need to have a relationship with Christ” is often too vague to be helpful to non-believers or new believers. Relationship is an awkward word that signifies a connection (You’ll sometimes hear someone say about their significant other, “I’m in a relationship.”), but it doesn’t signify a deep love or an abiding togetherness. The word doesn’t embody a commitment, just a connection.

The final words Jesus shared with all of His disciples before His crucifixion are recorded in John 15, probably from a vineyard. In that address (John 15:1-14), Jesus compares himself to a “true vine” and his followers as branches. Now a vine in a vineyard is not a long spindly branch, but closer to a short, round stump with spindly vines pushing out of it. (*Note: Draw this on the white board.*)

Christ, in this final address, implores his followers to abide in him. In fact, he’s so emphatic that he uses the word “abide” 10 times in six verses of John 15! Abide means to stay closely connected. In fact, if you serve a master, it means that your personal needs and goals are insignificant compared to His.

“Reading a book about a person isn’t the same thing as knowing the person who wrote the book. The challenge in abiding is always to break through from dutiful activities to a living, flourishing relationship with God,” writes Bruce Wilkinson in *Secrets of the Vine*. “In our Western-style rush to do and perform for God, we often falter at the task of simply enjoying His company.”

Abiding with him starts with obedience to His word, continues with daily prayer and Bible reading, and following God’s unique calling upon each of our lives. As Jesus promised, “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples” (John 15:7-8).

## CONCLUSION

So let’s close our eyes for a moment and imagine God walking through our campus tonight with some angels. He looks about at some students and says of one guy, “I don’t understand it. This one only wants to be a 30-fold Christian.”

Then He heads down to the commons and points at another believer and says, “He could be so much more, but she’s happy being a 60-fold Christian. She likes being better than other believers, but she doesn’t want to have to give everything to me.”

They continue walking the campus, and then His face lights up like a little kid on Christmas morning, “There’s one! There’s someone who believes in giving 100 percent of themselves to me. Do you see him? Do you see him? Do you see him?” The angels nod, some clapping, others breaking out in song—the famous chorus from Handel’s *Messiah* perhaps—and all cheering at the sight of another ambitious Christian determined to achieve 100-fold for the Master.

After all, it’s not your talent or your family name or having two parents who are still married, but it’s the effort you decide to put into loving God with your heart, soul, mind, and body.

There’s a glorious 2,000 year old legacy of success that you’re participating in. Don’t be afraid to give it all to God, and see what grows out of it.

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## LED-BY-THE-SPIRIT QUESTIONS

1. What characteristics make good ground (or a fertile heart) so good? *(Note: Write these on the white board.)*
2. Are there any characteristics that might differentiate a 30-fold Christian from a 60-fold or 100-fold Christian? What would those be?
3. Is it okay to be spiritually ambitious and want to be a 100-fold Christian for Christ? Why do some people have problems with marrying the word “ambitious” with Christianity?
4. What’s an area where you can be more spiritually ambitious to make a difference for Christ, perhaps pushing yourself toward greater Christian success.?
5. What is one area on the board that you will start working toward mastering, so that you can feature a fertile heart yielding a 100-fold for Christ? What benchmarks can you set to know if you’re achieving success in the next week? In the next month? In the next year? *(Note: Write possible benchmarks on the board.)*
6. Is there anyone nearby who can help you stay accountable to this goal? If so, how can they help?

## PRAYER

Thank you for your word, Father. Thank you for allowing it to be dispersed into the good ground of our hearts, even when we’re not necessarily open to it. Thank you for the challenges you present us so that we can do greater works in the kingdom for your glory. For while no one wants to fail for you, we sometimes forget we can continue on to greater things within our ministries and callings. You’ve given each of us a path that we can pursue and excel at when we glorify you. Please help our hearts to be good ground, ground your word will become embedded within and grow into wonderful and glorious fruit for you. Thank you for giving that opportunity again Father. Amen. ★